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June 29, 2006

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Camp Secures Pilot Program for Midland's Family Court in Annual Appropriations Bill Passed by House Today

Washington, DC – Focusing on ways to better serve young children and families appearing in family court, U.S. Rep. Dave Camp (R-Midland) has successfully included a pilot program to be overseen by Midland County Probate Judge Dorene Allen.

The program, a collaboration between Judge Allen, Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan and the Zero to Three Program, will develop a multidisciplinary Court Team in Midland County. The goal is to raise awareness, increase knowledge and skills, and change practice regarding the needs of maltreated infants and toddlers and their families involved in the child welfare system.

"I've worked closely with Justice Corrigan on a number of laws to improve the safety and health of children in the welfare and foster care systems, and this is just one more step to ensure every child is raised in a loving and supportive environment," said Camp. "I really want to commend Judge Allen and Justice Corrigan for bringing this project to Midland and to Michigan. We need to be doing everything possible to support the best interests of these children and get their families back on the right track."

"I am grateful to Rep. Camp for his support of this pilot program, which has exciting implications not only for Midland and Michigan, but for the nation," said Justice Corrigan. "We in the court system know that many children who go into foster care never get permanent homes, and end up aging out of the system without the much-needed support of a family. How much better it would be if we could preserve that family bond while ensuring the child's safety and well-being."

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Judge Allen explained the depth of the problem of neglected children who are in this age range. "In the last 18 months, in Midland County's new neglect cases, one-half of the children in those cases are infants to 3-year-olds. They are the most vulnerable children in our child protection cases. They are babies who are not yet able to talk or even walk. Bonding has long term benefits for both child and parent. The more bonded the child and parent are, the more of a chance for a successful on-going relationship. This program has the potential to allow those babies to have childhoods."

The program is based on a groundbreaking effort that was developed in the Miami-Dade Juvenile Court. That initiative provided parent-child therapeutic interventions to mothers and babies. Three years of data in the Miami-Dade Juvenile Court show substantial gains in improving parental sensitivity, child and parent interaction, and behavioral and emotional parental and child responsiveness. For those families completing treatment, 58 percent of children improved in their developmental functioning. There were no new substantiated reports of abuse or neglect, and 100 percent of infants were reunified with their families.

In Midland County the project will provide a child development specialist in the community who will work with Judge Allen to build capacity and provide the necessary resources to support systemic change. Zero to Three will make available training curriculum and other materials (print, video and web-based) on the science of early childhood development and will provide individualized training and technical assistance for the Court Team.

In their request for funding, Corrigan and Allen noted that, "Juvenile and Family Court Judges are responsible for the well-being of the children in their courts and can be powerful agents of change. They are uniquely positioned to improve the well-being of infants and toddlers in the child welfare system and to ensure that they are receiving the resources and supports they need to address their special needs. In fact, judges have an opportunity, perhaps the last one for these most vulnerable infants and toddlers, to focus on healing in the process of adjudicating the case."

The program, approved by the House as part of the Science, State, Justice, Commerce, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2007, will be funded under the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs. The House bill dedicated a total of \$115 million to the Office of Justice. The Midland project is expected to cost around \$335,000.

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